

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

March 2, 2017

The Honorable Ron Johnson
Chairman
Senate Homeland Security
and Governmental Affairs Committee
340 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC, 20510

The Honorable Claire McCaskill
Ranking Member
Senate Homeland Security
and Governmental Affairs Committee
442 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC, 20510

Dear Chairman Johnson and Ranking Member McCaskill:

We write to urge you and the Senate Homeland Security Committee to conduct a committee hearing on the alarming and unprecedented number of threats and attacks against faith-based sites across the country, including bomb threats to Jewish Community Centers (JCC).

In the first two months of 2017, 100 bomb threats have already occurred, including two in Albuquerque and one in Las Vegas, and have forced the evacuations of hundreds across the country. Additionally, the recent desecrations of predominantly Jewish burial sites in Pennsylvania and Missouri have shocked the nation. These anti-Semitic acts terrorize entire communities and seek to destabilize our faith-based institutions, many of which are the hub of daily life in the community.

President Trump rightly acknowledged this issue in his Presidential Address, stating “Recent threats targeting Jewish Community Centers and vandalism of Jewish cemeteries, as well as last week's shooting in Kansas City, remind us that while we may be a Nation divided on policies, we are a country that stands united in condemning hate and evil in all its forms.” We agree, and we must follow words with action. Federal, state, and local officials must act swiftly to help protect these sites and to ensure that these cowardly acts are not tolerated and are punished to the fullest extent possible.

To that end, we introduced bipartisan legislation on Monday that would provide \$20 million in additional funding to the Department of Homeland Security under the existing State Homeland Security Grant Program, specifically dedicated to safeguarding faith-based community centers. Importantly, this funding would not be limited to areas under the Urban Area Security Initiative, and would extend to state and local law enforcement agencies across the country since less populated communities are also being impacted. In order to deter and punish those responsible, this legislation would also double the federal penalty against making fake bomb threats from five years to 10 years. We respectfully request that you and your committee review and take action on this bipartisan legislation.

We also believe a congressional hearing would be beneficial to examine what actions the Administration can take to combat these horrendous threats at the earliest possible date. Faith-based community centers should be sanctuaries and open, inviting places for our citizens, and no American should feel unsafe at these centers. Anti-Semitism, or any faith-based targeting, is unacceptable and the United States Senate must demonstrate to the world that we are taking these threats against our communities seriously.

Thank you for your consideration of our request. We look forward to working with you and the Homeland Security Committee to combat homegrown domestic threats against faith-based communities in the United States.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Martin Heinrich', with a stylized, flowing script.

MARTIN HEINRICH
United States Senator

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Dean Heller', with a stylized, flowing script.

DEAN HELLER
United States Senator